

A STUDY OF CEMETERIES
IN ASHLEY COUNTY

by
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English IV
Mrs. Carpenter
February 7, 1977

Thesis: Today, more than ever, people are taking an interest in cemeteries--hunting family ties, or just enjoying a fascinating pastime. The cemeteries in Ashley County are especially interesting because of their country character, historical value, and their individuality.

- I. Ashley County contains eighty-one known cemeteries.
 - A. Cemeteries and burial methods have changed throughout the years.
 1. The earliest cemeteries were usually family plots and were almost always near the "family home."
 2. Yesterday's burial methods now seem quite primitive.
 - B. Due to the expense and bulkiness involved in transporting solid rock to the area, many graves did not have stones and were left unmarked.
- II. The oldest marked grave in Ashley County, dated 1849, is located in Wilmot and very few of the local residents are aware that it exists.
- III. Hamburg Cemetery is the largest in Ashley County.
 - A. The exact age of the cemetery is not known even though the Hamburg Cemetery Association keeps very detailed records.
 - B. Purchases of plots are made and recorded through the Hamburg Cemetery Association and they are responsible for the upkeep and administration of the cemetery.
- IV. Pinewood Memorial is the only perpetual care cemetery in Southeast Arkansas.
 - A. A cemetery must be accredited by the Arkansas State Cemetery Board to earn the title "perpetual care."
 - B. The cemetery is owned and administered by Jones Funeral Home.
- V. Many interesting stories can be heard about cemeteries in Ashley County.
 - A. In 1955, apparent supernatural forces settled disputes over the cedar trees in Mt. Olive Cemetery.
 - B. A sunken grave in Mt. Zion Cemetery caused excitement among the local residents.

Note: Throughout my research, I relied heavily on a double-volume book compiled by the Genealogical Records Committee of the Colonel Francis Vivian Brooking Chapter of the NSDAR. This committee, after years of searching, found eighty-one cemeteries. The information was typed and bound, and placed on file in the Ashley County library. Exact locations for each cemetery referred to were taken from this book, and are found on page iii.

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Ashley County contains eighty-one known cemeteries, although many of these are virtually impossible to reach without a guide. They can be found in each corner of the county. Some are carefully maintained, some are not. One contains a single grave while several are composed of over a thousand. Although details can be compared, and similarities found in each of these, they all remain unique.

Many years ago the words "God's Acre" or "churchyard" or "graveyard" were used to describe what we now call a cemetery. As the land was settled, an area was set aside for the family burial place. People were reluctant to leave their first home, and these burial areas made the sale of property difficult. Thus, the churchyard came into wide use as the place most families used for burial.¹

Coffins were often made by the neighborhood carpenter with boards donated by the local lumberyard. On occasion, lace was bought at the store to be draped and tacked on the inside.²

¹Robert Habenstein and William Lamers, The History of American Funeral Directing (Wisconsin, 1955), p. 428.

²A.H. Fuglaar, in a personal interview with the writer, February 1, 1977.

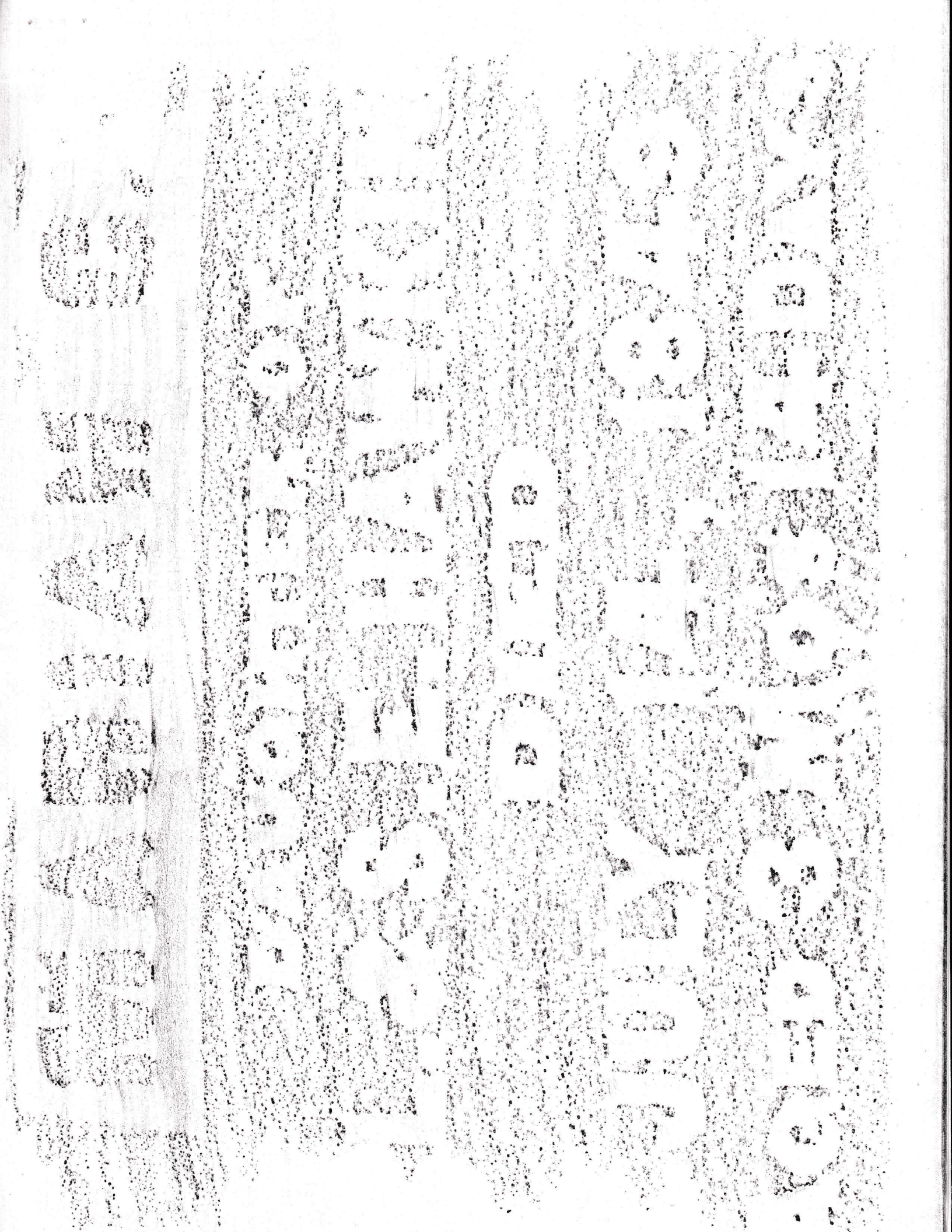
The locations for prospective cemeteries were carefully chosen. High ground was usually sought in order to deal with heavy rains and flooding.

This part of the state is well known for farm land, and suitable stones were rarely found to use as markers. Tombstones were brought to this area on boats that traveled up the Mississippi River from New Orleans. Trips to town were seldom and even then few traders could afford the extra cost, and extra weight on their wagons. This inconvenience meant that many graves did not have stones, and were left unmarked. Many times stones were placed at the graves years after the actual death and burial.¹

The earliest recorded death date in Ashley County is found at Dean Cemetery in Wilmot.² This cemetery is west of Wilmot on top of an Indian mound. The mound is approximately two hundred yards off the road in a fenced area, which is currently used as a pasture. Vines, which once made it difficult to climb the mound, have been torn away by the cattle, but in the process four of the original eight stones were broken. The four that remain have been pushed over, but are still readable, as was the case of the oldest stone. It marks the grave of Mariah C. Hawkins, and is dated in 1849. (see the illustration on the following page).

¹Mrs. Carl Dean Miller, in a personal interview with the writer, February 1, 1977.

²Colonel Francis Vivian Brooking Chapter, NSDAR, Tombstone Inscriptions of Ashley County, Arkansas (n. pub.), vol. I, p.47.



It is highly probable that this location was chosen because of its heighth, and closeness to the original homestead. At least one grave is unmarked, and possibly there are others.¹

Because the cemetery can not be seen from the road, and is used as a pasture, very few of the local residents are aware that it exists.²

The largest cemetery in Ashley County is the Hamburg Cemetery. Very detailed records concerning each transaction with the cemetery are kept by the Hamburg Cemetery Association, which was formed in 1919.³ The oldest section is the northeast corner; however, the exact age of the cemetery is not known. This is due to the fact that all of the lots in that area have been used, but many were left unmarked. When this section became full, the cemetery expanded three more times to reach its present capacity. More land is owned by the Cemetery Association, although it has not been cleared.

Lots are usually sold in units of eight for \$200, but other arrangements can be made.

The actual burial is taken care of by the Funeral Home in charge of the service, but thereafter, maintenance is by the Hamburg Cemetery Association. Memorials and donations make this possible, and every effort is then made to try to

¹Miller Interview.

²Bert Englerth, in a personal interview with the writer, February 1, 1977.

³Y.W. Etheridge, History of Ashley County, Arkansas (Arkansas, 1959), p. 157.

keep the cemetery orderly.¹

In addition to being the only perpetual care cemetery in Ashley County, Pinewood Memorial retains the honor of being the only cemetery of this type in Southeast Arkansas.

A cemetery must qualify for the title "perpetual care", which means acceptance and continued regulation by the Arkansas State Cemetery Board. Pinewood was established in 1956 by Jones Funeral Home, and now contains four thousand plots, one thousand of which have been used. It has a potential capacity of ten thousand. A designated amount of money from each plot sold goes into a trust fund, and interest from this fund is used for regular maintenance. To make this job easier, only flat bronze markers are used, however, a variety of styles can be chosen from. The Arkansas State Cemetery Board continues to audit the trust fund, and make sure that proper measures are taken for the upkeep of the cemetery.²

As would be expected, many interesting stories have been related about cemeteries in Ashley County.

Of these, an incident that occurred in Mt. Olive remains one of the most mysterious. Cedar trees grew abundantly, and the cemetery was quite beautiful. A number of these trees were used to mark graves that were without stones. As markers became easier to acquire, discontent was voiced among younger individuals that had purchased these stones. The

¹Mrs. Serrett, Secretary of the Hamburg Cemetery Association, in a personal interview with the writer, January 31, 1977.

²Billy Jones, in a personal interview with the writer, January 28, 1977.

cedar trees left a sticky, black residue on them, and the quickest cure seemed to be to cut down the trees. This idea was objected to strenuously by the oldsters whose loved ones' graves were marked by the trees. The argument grew and no compromise could seem to be agreed upon. One night, a small tornado came through the area and dipped down only once--inside the fence that surrounded the cemetery. Every cedar tree was toppled to the ground by the destructive winds, and the prolonged dispute was settled.¹

In 1976, Mt. Zion Cemetery received its share of attention. Occasionally, when dirt is not packed tight enough, or when the wooden crate surrounding a casket deteriorates, the grave will cave in. At times, the casket can actually be seen, and this was the case at Mt. Zion with one notable exception--it had a glass panel on the top. (This type of casket came into being in the late nineteenth century due to a desire to place the body in handsome surroundings. Versions of this casket are in use today²). Needless to say, the grave was quickly recovered to prevent the body from being on view.³

Further investigation revealed a 1937 grave piled high with fresh dirt.

Ashley County Cemeteries are growing in size each day. They contained over ten thousand inscriptions in 1970, and

¹Mr. and Mrs. John William Kilcrease, in a personal interview with the writer, January 27, 1977.

²Havenstein and Lamers, pp. 285-286.

³Jimmy Mack Sullivan, in a personal interview with the writer, January 27, 1977.

that number is rapidly rising.¹ Those that were abandoned are growing more remote each day, and may be impossible to locate in time. Every tomorrow uncovers a little more background, or a few more stories, and Ashley County Cemeteries continue to fascinate both the young and the old, alike.

¹ NSDAR, vol. II.

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27, 1977.

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27, 1977.

DEAN-two mile west of Wilmot about two hundred feet from highway #52. On a very, large high mound.

HAMBURG-located on highway #8, east of Hamburg, within the city limits.

PINEWOOD MEMORIAL-located on the west side of highway #82 between Hamburg and Crossett. It is approximately five miles west of Hamburg and approximately eight miles east of Crossett.

MT. OLIVE-located from intersection of highways #81 and #82 north of Hamburg, travel east on highway #82 for 2.4 miles. Turn north onto Promise Land Road and travel 9.3 miles; take left fork in road and continue straight for 1.6 miles more to Mt. Olive Cemetery, adjacent to road.

MT. ZION-from intersection of highways #81 and #82 south of Hamburg, travel south for 2.9 miles. Turn left in easterly direction onto gravel road. Mt. Zion Cemetery and Church are 5.3 miles from highway #81. It is adjacent to the gravel road.

Cemeteries Located in Ashley County, Arkansas

Legend

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1. Agee | 37. Moore |
| 2. Alexandria | 38. Morgan |
| 3. Antioch | 39. Mount Olive |
| 4. Beech Creek | 40. Mount Pleasant |
| 5. Bell | 41. Mount Zion |
| 6. Bethel | 42. New Texas
(or Taylor) |
| 7. Commack | 43. Norris |
| 8. Carlock | 44. Old Central |
| 9. Carter | 45. Old Hogue |
| 10. Cleveland | 46. Old Union |
| 11. Cross Roads | 47. Parkdale |
| 12. Crow | 48. Pinewood Memorial |
| 13. Dailey | 49. Pleasant Grove |
| 14. Daniel | 50. Poley Ridge |
| 15. Dean | 51. Portland |
| 16. Dry Bayou | 52. Powell |
| 17. Duckworth | 53. Promise Land |
| 18. Eden | 54. Pugh |
| 19. Edwards | 55. Rawls |
| 20. Egypt | 56. Rogers |
| 21. Extra | 57. Sanders |
| 22. Flat Creek | 58. Seamons-Loflin |
| 23. Grant | 59. Silor |
| 24. Green | 60. Simms |
| 25. Griswold | 61. Snyder |
| 26. Hamburg | 62. Spring Hill |
| 27. Hedge-Boyd | 63. Trafalgar |
| 28. Hickory Grove | 64. Troy |
| 29. Jackson | 65. Unity |
| 30. Judson | 66. Waddell |
| 31. Kirkpatrick | 67. Walker |
| 32. Lakewood
(or Crossett) | 68. White |
| 33. Lick Prairie | 69. Williams |
| 34. McDermott | 70. Will Nutt |
| 35. Macedonia
(or Petersburg Trail) | 71. Wilmot |
| 36. Montrose | 72. Zion |

73. Blanks
 74. Cain (or Hopkins)
 75. Callaway
 76. Carter (Old)
 77. Cason
 78. Looney
 79. Pierce
 80. Prairie Chapel
 81. Thompson

